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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
January 27, 1975

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Succession in Iran

The Iranian constitution reserves the crown for the male decedents of Reza Shah Pahlavi, father of the current Shah. The current Shah has two sons: the eldest, now 14, is designated as the Crown Prince and is being groomed to succeed his father. The Shah, through a constitutional amendment in 1967, sought to ensure the orderly transfer of power to his son. The Amendment provides that if the Shah should die before October 31, 1980--the 20th birthday of the Crown Prince--Empress Farah, mother of the Crown Prince, will become regent, unless the Shah has named another person to that post.

The Empress is directed by the amendment to form a regency council composed of the prime minister, the heads of the two houses of parliament, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, and four "knowledgeable" persons. The council will advise the regent until the Crown Prince reaches the age of twenty.

The Shah has in the course of interviews made reference to a "political will." Although its content is unknown, it probably specifies the non-statutory members of the regency council. As of today, the likely candidates include Minister of Court Alam, Air Force Commander Khatami, Minister of Economy Ansari, and Minister of Interior Amuzagar.

The Shah's action in designating Farah as regent in 1967 reflected his growing confidence in the loyalty and ability of the Empress. She is popular within Iran, and the Shah has in recent years sought to broaden her experience in matters of state.

The Empress' popularity, the constitutional legitimacy of her position, and the expectation that she would appoint to the regency council the Shah's most trusted advisers suggests that a relatively smooth transfer of power and a continuity of

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policy would occur in case of the Shah's death. There probably would be little change in Iran's major priorities--a high price for crude oil exports, rapid industrialization, and military and political dominance in the Persian Gulf.

Nevertheless, the Shah's death before 1980 would create a power vacuum that the Empress could not fill. Challenges to her position would probably come from veteran palace intriguers, [REDACTED] and possibly from provincial elites and some members of parliament who would try to assert their power during a period of weak central authority. Moreover, the appointment of a woman to the regency would be an innovation in a country where women are just beginning to get equal social and political rights.

An interregnum, therefore, would likely be characterized by shifting alliances of powerful individuals and elite groups, each seeking to "use" the Empress for their own ends. The military and security forces, though now largely apolitical would become the key factor in any such maneuvering.

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